

# LUCKY WANDERERS ROB OXFORD IN MUDBATH TUSSLE

By "SPOT KICK"

Wycombe Wanderers 3, Oxford City 1

EVERY kick sent up a cascade of mud and water, every shot was a gamble, every tackle a watery hazard in this near-fiasco of a game, as a freak thunder-storm swept the ground and an almost continuous down-pour flooded the pitch and left it a cloying quagmire.

But however fickle the weather, for a Boxing Day attraction that had promised a needle test for the clubs' third meeting of the season, there was again nothing fickle about the Wanderers' luck. Busy Oxford, showing their best form for weeks, had the mortification of claiming three parts of the play and seeing Wycombe romp home with the Isthmian League points.

That the game did not degenerate into a complete fiasco was a tribute to the drenched, mud-daubed players, who never gave up trying to play football. There were few echoes of support for the occasional plea from a rain-soaked spectator: 'Why don't you abandon it ref!'

## HIGH STANDARD

Indeed the remarkable thing about this astonishing match was that the standard of soccer was so high. Oxford fought back with tremendous spirit after an early Wycombe goal and many a slick determined forward movement, triumphing over the atrocious conditions, kept the huddled crowd entertained throughout.

As flashes of lightning broke the gloom another Wycombe shock-tactics start brought a characteristic goal from Paul Bates, who swept up a pass from Trott, eluded the backs, and coolly placed the ball well out of goalkeeper Staniland's grasp.

It was a flourish that falsely flattered again, for the burly Oxford men, moving the ball with greater success in the clinging mud, soon dispelled Wycombe hopes of a runaway win.

Howlett and Bricknell, stars of the City front line, inspired a quick come-back and nine minutes later, after Jackson and Howlett had cracked the home defence, 18-year-old newcomer Jack Woodley equalised with a well-taken shot from the left wing.

## UNDER SIEGE

For prolonged spells then Wycombe found themselves under fierce siege as Oxford's determined forwards smacked the ball hard and often. Howlett and Bricknell, especially, often made the home defence look vulnerable, in spite of an impressive performance by Johnny Weaver.

Most of the action stayed in the Wycombe half, yet by half-time all off-the-mark Oxford had to show for maximum effort was an offside goal, from Bricknell—while Wycombe had had a bonus encourager in the 34th minute, when Weaver, taking a free-kick for a foul on Bates, surprisingly found the mark from 40 yards out!

After the early promise Wycombe's attack had clicked only spasmodically into effective action, with the left flank drooping, Bates lacking support and most of the promise coming from the more forthright tactics of Atkins and Trott.

Left-winger Free was by no means at his best and Rockell's return to the senior ranks was unspectacular—but Free at least provided the centre by which the vigilant Cliff Trott stubbed home a third goal for the Wanderers within a minute of the second half.

As the downpour continued unabated, conditions by now were just about the worst ever seen at Loakes Park, but Oxford kept the tussle fast and furious by their gallant refusal to accept defeat in face of a score which certainly flattered Wycombe.

And most of the thrills, in the mud-bath splash and slither of the second half, came in the Wycombe goal area, with the Wanderers lucky to survive—particularly on one occasion when Bricknell and Howlett smacked in shots which looked to have gone over as Syrett and the backs juggled precipitously on the line.

Oxford City—J. Staniland; A. Jackson, A. Crossingham; J. Evans, D. Buswell, F. Jackson; A. Bricknell, B. Harris, A. Howlett, R. Goodison, J. Woodley.

Wycombe Wanderers — D. Syrett; J. Beck, J. Moring; J. Truett, J. Fisher, J. Weaver; D. Atkins, C. Trott, P. Bates; M. Rockell, G. Free.